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Chioveanu, Mirela

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# European Women at War (1914-1918)

MIRELA CHIOVEANU

"The Great War allowed Women  
to stand on their own feet."

JEAN COX

Few events in modern history fascinate the West European reader as much as the Great War of 1914-1918. Though continuously reprocessed and reinterpreted by scholars, the "Armageddon of our times" remains ostensibly obscured<sup>1</sup>. Despite the significant variety of theoretical approaches, perspectives, and comprehensive narratives little is still known, in general lines, about World War I in Eastern Europe<sup>2</sup>. In this sense, the case of Romania is in many respects the most representative. Worst, recent surveys indicate that Romanians do not know much about this episode of their modern history, and the Great War at large<sup>3</sup>.

Over the last century, Romanian historians approached the Great War from a traditional, meaning political and military history, and limited by national ideology, perspective. With rare exceptions, "Greater Romania" as an outcome represented the main, not to say exclusive, focal point<sup>4</sup>. Hence, despite the bulk of books and articles, the utmost centrality of the topic for the national *saga* made historians ignore peculiar aspects such as the one proposed by the present study. Except for several recent works, women are barely mentioned<sup>5</sup>. No wonder, as long as women history, history from below, and micro history are still marginalized by the Romanian historiographical mainstream.

Based on the case study of Romania, the present paper aims to sketch out in a combined European-national context the story of Romanian women caught in the turmoil of the events of 1916-1918. The icon of women as active participants in the war efforts and not only victims and passive out lookers is stressed as a critical issue in general, and tested in the particular case of Romania. Decisively influenced by the work of Maria Bucur, Șerban Rădulescu-Zoner, and Beatrice Marinescu in the case of Romania<sup>6</sup>, and by the work of Jay Winter, Claire M. Tylee, Susan R.

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<sup>1</sup> Jack ROTH (ed.), *World War I: A Turning Point in Modern History*, Alfred A. Knoff Inc., New York, 1967.

<sup>2</sup> Jay WINTER, Geoffrey PARKER, Mary R. HABECK (eds.), *The Great War and the Twentieth Century*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2000, pp. 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> See Florin TURCANU, "Primul Război Mondial a căzut în uitare", *Revista 22*, XIX, no. 975, November 11, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Lucian BOIA, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, Central European University Press, Budapest, 2001, pp. 7-12.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen A. FISCHER-GALAȚI, *Rumania: A Bibliographic Guide*, Library of Congress, Washington, 1963, p. 21. Professor Galați is the first to underline the absence of women in Romanian historical writings. The situation remained almost unchanged to the present.

<sup>6</sup> Maria BUCUR, "Între mituri, icoane și tăceri: Femeile române în primul război mondial", in Mădălina NICOLAESCU (ed.), *Cine suntem noi? Despre identitatea femeilor din România modernă*, Editura Anima, București, 1996; Șerban RĂDULESCU-ZONER, Beatrice MARINESCU, *Bucureștii în anii primului război mondial: 1914-1918*, Editura Albatros, București, 1993.

Grayzel, and Gill Thomas in the case of Western Europe<sup>1</sup>, my intention is to go beyond the handful of already explored topics. Thus, my selection of themes and the interpretation that derives from it aims first to explore and then present in a synthetic way various issues relating women experience with war, aspects that are often neglected or rapidly discarded.

The period from the early days to the aftermath of World War I is covered by the present study. Great events and women implications in war efforts in Western Europe are presented in general lines, as to indicate by means of asymmetric comparison<sup>2</sup>, and by recurring to established methodologies and historical narratives, how the Romanian case is similar to or substantially differs from other European cases. My intention when focusing on the interpretative framework and the current state of knowledge in Western literature is to determine if proper to use similar methods of analysis and raise identical questions in order to understand the complexity of women's entanglements with war. This approach might lead to valuable insights, and helps me remove, though only from a very narrow perspective, the established canon and stereotypical images, as to place the Romanian case into a larger frame.

Several questions have to be addressed in the case of Romanian women, their implication and contribution to the First World War. A discussion on the place and role of women within society in the eve of the Great War never took place, despite the fact that several circumstances suggest that such an approach might clarify various aspects regarding the more general topic of Romania's experiences during the war. For example, the fact that at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Romanian traditional society placed women exclusively within their private/domestic sphere might explain why, after 1916, women's participation, rather marginal and unofficial, in the war efforts was not appraised at all by the politicians<sup>3</sup>.

A multidisciplinary investigation that includes qualitative types of analysis, my study aims to reconstruct the experiences of Romanian women during the Great War on the basis of accessible Romanian sources. The image of ordinary women in both the occupied zone and Moldavia comes under scrutiny. Real, mundane, individual and collective problems, trauma, resentments, and huge materials and human costs make my special interest.

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<sup>1</sup> Susan R. GRAYZEL, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1999; Gill THOMAS, *Life on all Fronts: Women in the First World War*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989; Claire M. TYLEE, *The Great War and Women's Consciousness: Images of Militarism and Womanhood in Women's Writings, 1914-64*, The MacMillan Press Ltd., London, 1990; Jay WINTER, *The Great War and the British People*, Pandora Press, London, 1986. See also Gail BRAYBON, Penny SUMMERFIELD, *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars*, Pandora Press, London, 1987; David MITCHELL, *Women on the Warpath: The Story of Women of the First World War*, Jonathan Cape, London 1965; Angela K. SMITH (ed.), *Women's Writing of the First World War: An Anthology*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Jurgen KOCKA, "Asymmetric Historical Comparison: The case of the German *Sonderweg*", *History & Theory*, vol. 38, no. 7-10, 1999, pp. 47-49. This method, though risky, is to widen horizons and motivate empirical research as to uncover initially one-sided or distorted assumptions and interim results.

<sup>3</sup> Between 1916-1918, several press campaigns conducted by officials in Iași, the capital of Moldavia, now the only territory controlled by Romanian authorities, appealed women by means of nationalism. For Romanian women the most important duty was to educate their children in a patriotic spirit. Hence, Motherhood constituted their single virtue. See Cecilia CUȚESCU-STORCK, *Fresca unei vieți*, Editura Bucovina, București, 1943, pp. 307-323.

One major topic is largely addressed by the present paper, namely World War I. A turning point and a moment of crisis that generated not only political and military changes but also the upheaval of traditional institutions and norms, the erosion of old values, the reconfiguration of public and private spaces, the war is approached as an ideal-type and meant to help me prefigure the object of study<sup>1</sup>. My analysis focuses on the way World War foster social change and generated huge expectations at different levels in West European societies<sup>2</sup>. In addition, the Romanian case comes under scrutiny. The distinction between West and East, core and periphery, are analyzed from the perspective of war, and women.

By and large, my paper includes two parts. The first, which is a short, sketchy and somewhat idealized overview of the Great War<sup>3</sup> in Europe, especially in the West, concentrates on the "home front"<sup>4</sup>. Taking into account that the war years fundamentally changed the character of the European societies, as well as Europe's relation with the rest of the world, making impossible the reconstruction of Europe and the restoration of her prestige on a pre-1914 basis, my focus is on the real problems and changes that occurred behind the front line. During the war, states, as well as women, tried to maintain an uneasy balance between preserving the existing situation on one hand, and fastening changes on the other, so that women could temporarily join men in sustaining their nations at war. The real implication of women in the war efforts offered them a major argument in changing their role from spectators into active actors of the public and political scene.

The events of 1914-1918 represented for Romania, as reflected at the level of public and political discourse, the occasion to accomplishing the unification of all Romanian territories, and thus create "Greater Romania". The enthusiasm of the entire Romanian population following the short campaign of the Romanian army in Transylvania is the best and most convincing testimony in this sense. However, during the war, the Romanian state and society had to face real and often unbearable problems: an unprepared army, an inefficient medical system, huge human losses and so on; with serious and immediate consequences. The second part reconstructs the general picture of silent feminine actors on both sides of the front line, actors who contributed and even sacrificed their lives during the war, often without asking for any material or moral compensation, nonetheless trying desperately to face the challenges of everyday life. No attention is given to Queen Marie, "Mama Răniților" (The Mother of all Wounded)<sup>5</sup>, and to Ecaterina Teodoroiu, the soldier-woman<sup>6</sup>, the only vivid icons of Romanian women to the Romanian collec-

<sup>1</sup> See Sandra HALPERIN, *War and Social Change in Modern Europe. The Great Transformation Revisited*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Jay WINTER, Geoffrey PARKER, Mary R. HABECK (eds.), *The Great War...cit.*, pp. 22-25.

<sup>3</sup> The term "First World War" was coined in 1921 by a sarcastic officer and journalist, Charles A'Court Repington. See Charles A'Court REPINGTON, *The First World War, 1914-1918*, 2 vols., London, 1921. Colonel Repington was the military correspondent of the *Times* daily. Most historians and journalists used at the time and in the aftermath of the conflict the term "The Great War", "La Grande Guerre", "La Grande Guerra".

<sup>4</sup> Susan R. GRAYZEL, *Women's Identities at War...cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Lucian BOIA, *History and Myth...cit.*, p. 208.

<sup>6</sup> See E. GROZEA, *Sublocotenentul Ecaterina Teodoroiu*, Editura Militară, București, 1982. See also Victor ATANASIU, Ion M. OPREA (eds.), *România în primul război mondial*, Editura Militară, București, 1979; Constantin KIRIȚESCU, *Istoria războiului pentru întregirea României, 1916-1919*, vol. 1-3, București, 1925.

tive memory of the First World War. Retelling their story would be useless, and only to generate disproportions that would render my analysis floppy.

To this day the Great War remains a territory of vivid debates. Scholars still dispute its causes, its character, and its legacies. The war of 1914-1918 is in many ways unprecedented: never had so many nations been involved; never had a war absorbed so much the resources of the combatants nor left them so exhausted; and never had the slaughter been of such magnitude and so senseless. It was also the first war to affect and involve the entire civilian population. Women participated in this total war in many ways, many more than history books usually suggest, and their lives were greatly altered by it. Yet, in the aftermath, little or no room was made to them by historians. There were, to be sure, occasional anecdotes about life behind the lines, but serious attention was focused elsewhere, on the war's causes, aims and costs, as well as on military strategies and tactics. Economical and political approaches predominated in works ranging from the Carnegie series<sup>1</sup> to Georges-Henri Soutou's work *L'Or et le Sang*<sup>2</sup>. Only recently, social history took note of women presence and contribution to the war effort<sup>3</sup>. So did women history, which, being deeply influenced by the feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s was rather interested in linking war with the process of women's emancipation, therefore offering fairly enthusiastic answers<sup>4</sup>. War undermined the existing order, indicating that warfare is no longer an exclusive male activity. Working in ammunition factories, as streetcar conductors, serving as nurses and auxiliaries in the Army, women took responsibility, enjoyed a brand new type of social mobility and became self-confident. In Great Britain their contribution to the war effort earned official recognition by the *Women's War Work Subcommittee of the Imperial War Museum*. In France and Germany women had to content themselves with the unofficial honors bestowed by organizations such as *L'Effort Féminin*, which promoted an often uncritical view of their wartime role. In the 1970s, when British historians interviewed British women who participated in the war effort, nearly all of them expressed a sense of liberation and retrospective pride. "Out of the cage" was a sentiment often voiced in interviews with researchers from the *Imperial War Museum* and the *Museum of Southampton*<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> In the 1920s the *Carnegie Foundation for International Peace* and *Yale University Press* start publishing an extensive series of studies concerning the economic and social history of the First World War.

<sup>2</sup> Georges-Henri SOUTOU, *L'Or et le sang: les buts de guerre économiques de la Première Guerre mondiale*, Fayard, Paris, 1989.

<sup>3</sup> For France see Jean-Jacques BECKER, 1914: *comment les Français sont entrés dans la guerre*, Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, Paris, 1977; IDEM, *Les Français dans la Grande Guerre*, Robert Laffont, Paris, 1980; Antione PROST, *Les Anciens Combattants et la société française*, Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, Paris, 1977. On Germany and Great Britain, see Gerald D. FELDMAN, *Army, Industry and Labor in Germany, 1914-1918*, Berg Publishers, Oxford, 1992; Jürgen KOCKA, *Facing Total War: Germany Society, 1914-1918*, Berg Publishers Ltd., UK, 1984; Arthur MARWICK, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, The Bodley Head, London, 1965; Jay WINTER, *The Great War...cit.*; Richard WALL, Jay WINTER (eds.), *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work, and Welfare in Europe, 1914-1918*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988.

<sup>4</sup> David MITCHELL, *Women on the Warpath: The Story of the Women of the First World War*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1966; Arthur MARWICK, *Women at War, 1914-1918*, Fontana Paperbacks, London, 1977.

<sup>5</sup> Gail BRAYBON, Penny SUMMERSFIELD, *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World War*, Pandora Press, London, 1987.

When war broke out in Europe in the summer of 1914, though initially shocked by the event, most civilians soon gave way to enthusiasm – which was more prevalent in urban than in rural areas, and more common among men than women<sup>1</sup>. Europeans were mentally prepared for it. In French schools the memory of the humiliating peace treaty and lost provinces at the end of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871 was kept alive. Germany, proud of her economic success, and convinced by the superiority of her civilization, initiated the war as to conquer territories from the “barbaric” Russian Empire and defeat an “effeminate” France<sup>2</sup>. Everywhere, in all belligerent countries, the departure of troops on the front was accompanied by wholehearted patriotic mass demonstrations. The war was defined in almost all European countries as a great national endeavor and a revolutionary and modernizing experience.

Soon after hostilities started it became clear for governments and civilians alike that war would not end soon. Mounting difficulties were brought up by the huge material and human costs triggered by war. Civilians were mobilized, women included, to back the war efforts. Slogans such as “Ladies, your country need you!” promoted by recruiting posters and in public speeches, often issued within feminists circles<sup>3</sup>. On August 7, 1914, the French government appealed to French women, especially to peasant women, whose services the government believed were urgently needed in farm fields abandoned by their husbands, enlisted in the army:

“Rise up, women and children of France, daughters and sons of the nation. Take the place in the field of labor of those who are now on the field of battle. Be ready to show them, very soon now, the cultivated land, the completed harvest, and the seeded fields! In these grave hours no toil is insignificant. Whatever serves the country is great. Arise! To action! To work! Tomorrow there will be glory enough for everyone”<sup>4</sup>.

With no sign of a clear victor ahead, and a stagnant front stretching over five hundred miles, all illusory hopes dissipated. Lethal battles devoured men and ammunitions, and new weapons, increasingly sophisticated and deadly, were quick into service. Governments set up agencies to supervise the transformation of national arsenals and private factories into a centralized, modern warfare industry. Minds and bodies alike were mobilized as war was fought on two fronts: the battle front, and the home front. Combat was exclusively for men – in four and a half years, 8 million men, more than 60 percent of the workforce, were mobilized in France, 13 million in Germany, and 5.7 million in Great Britain –, whereas women had to replace them at home, fighting the war behind the lines. In France, where there were already 7.7 million women (including 3.5 million *paysannes*) working prior to 1914, the mobilization of women was largely *ad hoc*. Often, soldiers were replaced at jobs by members of their family: wife, daughter, or sister. Although this practice was rare in industry, it was very common in trading, banks, transportations

<sup>1</sup> Françoise THÉBAUD, “The Great War and the Triumph of Sexual Division”, in IDEM (ed.), *A History of Women in The West*, vol. 5, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 24-25.

<sup>2</sup> Jürgen REULECKE, “Männerbund versus the Family: Middle-class Youth Movements and the Family in the Period of the First World War”, in Richard WALL, Jay WINTER (eds.), *The Upheaval of War...cit.*, pp. 439-451.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Arthur MARWICK, *Women at War...cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> Françoise THÉBAUD, “The Great War and the Triumph of Sexual Division”, *cit.*, pp. 27-28.

and some governmental agencies. France had its *financières* (bank ladies) and *cheminottes* (railway ladies)<sup>1</sup>. Conversely, in ammunitions factories, women were rarely hired, only when employers run out of male personnel. However, with late 1915, Étienne Clémentel, the minister of commerce, and Albert Thomas, the socialist minister of armament, urged industrialists to hire women whenever it was possible. High wages offered by wartime factories, and the real need to find jobs, attracted numerous women. From 1915 to 1918 some 400 000 women, one-quarter of the total labor force, worked in war industries<sup>2</sup>.

In Germany, women were progressively mobilized in war industry. At first, their contribution was minor and sporadic, but recruitment was intensified and centralized in the last part of the war, when the economy was organized in a military way, and the government realized that victory can not be achieved unless women were part of the war effort. Thus, the *General Groener's Kriegsamt* (The War Office) established a *Frauenreferat* (Department for Women) responsible with recruitment, and a *Frauenarbeitszentrale* (Central Office for Women's Labor) which was responsible for the welfare of women workers. By early 1918 these departments hired around 1000 women. Mobilization led to an increase number of women working in metal, electrical, and chemical industries. But the contribution of German women to the war effort included more than this. Clothing makers were put, especially in the Black Forest area, to manufacture ammunitions; corset-makers made tents and mess kits; and women who had never worked before were given jobs as well – making gas masks, socks, rucksacks, and even uniforms.

In England, women recruitment was accelerated by conscriptions campaigns endorsed, with December 1916, by the government. Excellent cooperation among the government, unions<sup>3</sup>, and employers was fostered as to win the war. On the basis of agreements between government and unions, women first replaced men in commercial establishments and offices, where the unions were forceless and work was considered respectable. Later on, they moved into other branches, and industry. Although the attitude in Britain was in general more hostile toward women labor than in France, statistics indicate an increasing number of hired women between July 1914 (5.9 million) and November 1918 (7.3 million)<sup>4</sup>. England also stands out in another respect: it was the first country that established a *Women's Army Auxiliary Corps* (WAAC) in the spring of 1917<sup>5</sup>. By November 1918, WAAC enlisted some 40 000 women, out of which 8 500 were sent overseas to cook, clean, assist priests, type, and drive Ambulances and Army trucks, but not fight. The history of this unit

<sup>1</sup> Patrick FRIDENSON (ed.), *The French Home Front: 1914-1918*, Berg Publishers, Oxford, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> The number of women employed in industry and commerce did not exceed the prewar levels until 1916, and only by the end of 1917 women employment reached its highest level. At that time, women accounted for 40% of the total labor-force, compared with 32% before the war. See Françoise THÉBAUD, "The Great War and the Triumph of Sexual Division", cit., p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> The second decade of the twentieth century, especially the wartime years, registered a peak of British trade unionism. Union leaders and government cooperated in implementing social and economic reforms. In 1917, the unions were granted the authority to issue labor cards entitling the bearer to exemption from military service. In return, the unions accepted the principle of "dilution", according to which skilled workers called under arms could be replaced by semiskilled or unskilled employees, and the principle of "substitution", which permitted women to find a job in many branches of industries. See Alastair REID, "The Impact of the First World War on British Workers", in Richard WALL, Jay WINTER (eds.), *The Upheaval of War...cit.*, pp. 221-233.

<sup>4</sup> See Gill THOMAS, *Life on All Fronts...cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> See Susan R. GRAYZEL, *Women's Identities at War...cit.*

is an indicator of just how difficult it was for the men, both civilians and military, to imagine and accept women near the front line, side by side with the soldiers<sup>1</sup>.

During the Great War, women were also active with the Red Cross and other charitable organizations. For women coming from middle and upper classes, familiar with charity work, the war was a period of feverish service. The charitable organizations, patronized by Queen Mary of Great Britain and by the Crown Princess of Sweden, Margaret, helped collecting funds, clothing, bandages, medicine, and so on; that were very much needed on the front. Overwhelmed by the huge numbers of wounded, hospitals accepted thousands of volunteers – more than 70 000 in France, compared with 30 000 paid staff<sup>2</sup>. Some of these women were assigned to auxiliary hospitals, while others drove ambulances, and a few were even sent to the front – the French were more hesitant in this respect than the British. In the case of Great Britain, more than 25 000 women went to work on the front, on three continents – Europe, Asia, and Africa –, as nurses and doctors, ambulance drivers, in army canteens and recreations clubs<sup>3</sup>. Many died of bombs or epidemics, others returned home safely, with medals and touching stories to tell. Media praised women efforts as nurses, less as soldiers and workers in factories. Yet, officially, to the end of the war, women supreme self-sacrifice consisted in the death of their sons on the battle camp, for the nation and the Fatherland. Needless to say that their continuous battle with daily challenges rarely made the attention of the authorities<sup>4</sup>.

What happened to the families of those who went to war? All belligerent governments, except the United States government, introduced what the British government called "separation allowances", which were paid to legitimate wives as well as concubines, and varied in amount according to the number of children. The British allowance, paid from the early days to the end of the war, was somewhat generous, slightly higher in fact than the average wage of a single woman. France and Germany persisted in viewing these payments as a form of welfare, and thus kept the amounts at a low level. Once women were regularly receiving their separation allowance they met other problems. In England, bishops, magistrates, and organizations such as the *Catholic Women's League* accused soldiers' and sailors' wives of spending their allowance on drinking, and neglecting their children:

"In many cases the money being paid to soldiers' and sailors' dependants is being shockingly and shamefully wasted. Many families go dinnerless on Mondays because the women who have drawn the Government money remain in the public house from 11am till late in the afternoon"<sup>5</sup>.

Both soldiers' and sailors' wives tried to prove that the accusations were false. One hundred and forty-eight branches of the *National Society for the Prevention of*

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<sup>1</sup> Marilyn Shevin-COETZEE, Frans COETZEE, *World War I and European Society*, Boston University Press, Massachusetts, 1995, pp. 160-177. During the war only the Russian army had a special, women made, *Death Battalion*.

<sup>2</sup> Françoise THÉBAUD, "The Great War and the Triumph of Sexual Division", cit., p. 41.

<sup>3</sup> Gill THOMAS, *Life on All Fronts...* cit., pp. 30-36.

<sup>4</sup> "My daughter went out at 7am to the Maypole Dairy Co. shop and after waiting till 10.30 am was turned away without any margarine, came home chilled to the bone besides losing her education." *Workers' Dreadnought* [a weekly newspaper of the East London Federation of Suffragettes, edited by Sylvia Pankhurst]; quoted in Gill THOMAS, *Life on All Fronts...* cit., p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> Theophilus SIMPSON, "The Underworld of Manchester", in *Wartime*, 1915; quoted in *Ibidem*, p. 28.



*Cruelty to Children* (NSPCC) investigated the case. They found out that women had not spent their separation allowances on drinking. Yet, the government decided to act upon rumors of drunkenness. It asked the police, schools and charitable institutions to oversee the servicemen's wives. If the police was to find these women drunk more than once, they were to lose their separation allowances. Some middle and upper class women also paid attention to this issue, and set up clubs for the working class wives of soldiers and sailors. These clubs were to encourage women not to go to pubs. Instead women could read, write letters, or discuss their current problems. The organizers also gave lectures on cooking, hygiene, and childcare, activities that were not very popular among working class women. However, women went to the clubs to meet each other, talk about their anxieties, and share their worries for the beloved ones.

The toll of military casualties in World War I is staggering: nearly nine million dead. Serbia lost a quarter of its troops, while France sacrificed 1.3 million of its men, 10% of the active male population and more than 3% percent of the total population. Germany lost 1.8 million men, almost 3% of its population, while Italy sacrificed around 750 000 soldiers, most of them young. Romania lost one out of four soldiers, and 10% of the prewar population. In the case of Great Britain more than 6 million men, 28% of the male population went to war; 1.7 million were wounded and almost 730 000 killed. Military operations decimated the troops but spared the life of civilians, in the West, where the front was quickly stabilized. Air bombings killed 1,500 in England, and 600 in Paris. Nearly all women knew someone who fought the war and was mutilated or killed. The burden was not only physical but also emotional<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, dramatic situations occurred in the occupied zones. German invasion brought its share of atrocities, including the destruction of villages, executions of hostages, the confiscation of supplies, labor camps where civilians were forced to work. There were situations when women were raped and brutalized by soldiers<sup>2</sup>. Starvation and diseases were but two other messengers of the Apocalypse: in Germany approximately 700 000 civilians (urban families with many children, living on fixed incomes, were the most vulnerable) died of malnutrition<sup>3</sup>; typhus, and with the end of war Spanish Influenza wiped millions throughout Europe, particularly young men and women. Therefore, unsurprisingly, in Western Europe, women also decided to fight against war.

Pacifist manifestations occurred in almost all belligerent countries. Even a World Congress was organized in Hague, in 1915; 1136 women from 12 different countries, out of which 5 were at war, met to discuss how war can be brought to an end. They came from Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, the Nederland, Norway, Sweden, and the United States. The women at the Congress called for the set up of an international organization called *The League for Permanent Peace*. They adopted twenty resolutions, including an immediate ceasefire, solutions for a lasting peace, the introduction of peace education in schools, women right to vote, and so on. They also decided to send peace messengers to the governments of the countries at war as well as to the neutrals, including the United States. Yet, pacifism barely registered real success as

<sup>1</sup> Susan R. GRAYZEL, *Women's Identities at War...cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 41.

<sup>3</sup> Richard WALL, "English and German Families and the First World War, 1914-1918", in Richard WALL, Jay WINTER (eds.), *The Upheaval of War...cit.*, pp. 43-105.

most Europeans, women included, sided with the governments and the nationalistic mainstream.

Feminism was another movement that attempted to benefit from the situation created by war. Clothed up in the formula of "patriotic feminism"<sup>1</sup>, it was in fact but another expression of women's aspiration for political rights, for, as one English suffragette put it "the right to vote for heroines as well as heroes". This "campaign", which began prior to 1914, was in some cases successful. In the United States president Woodrow Wilson formally announced his support for the Nineteenth Amendment, which was passed on the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 1918 by the House of Representative. The Senate passed the amendment in June 1918, and over the next fourteen month it was ratified by thirty-six states. In Great Britain, the war affected the suffrage issue only indirectly, by way of impact on the overall political situation. The need for sweeping electoral reform became a major issue within British politics and political system, whose residential and property qualifications, as well as its exclusion of women made it look completely undemocratic. On February 6, 1918 the British Parliament voted the law which conferred the right to vote to all men and women over the age of thirty. In France the Committee on Universal Suffrage also chose a minimum voting age of thirty when, after much hesitation, it finally presented the Dussaussoy voting reform bill to the Chamber of Deputies in May 1919. Although the Chamber passed the bill, the Senate refused even to consider it and finally let it "die". In November 1922, senators justified their decision saying that women had no place in the political arena, and, paradoxically as it may seem, the left Radical Party expressed its fear that women's vote might prove conservative. In Central Europe, following the collapse of the Empires, reformist liberals and socialists uphold the idea of granting women the right to vote as a way of preventing a proletarian social revolution, and in order to enforce political democratization. In Germany for example women were granted political rights on November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1918. During the war German women had been thanked for their work with a day of homage (the Frauentag of June 1915) and a congratulatory telegram from Marshal Hindenburg to Gertrude Bäumer on September 1917. The Kaiser promised in his Easter message of 1917 to grant his subjects a greater role in politics, but the Reichstag twice proclaimed its belief that the role of women should be limited to *kuche, kinder, kirsche*. Russia represented a special case. After the abdication of the Tsar, the Kerenski provisional government granted women the right to vote and hold office on July 20, 1917<sup>2</sup>. In Romania women had to wait for three more decades.

When the armistice was announced on November 11, 1918, the war "left Europe prostrate and America triumphant"<sup>3</sup>. The defeated German and Austria-Hungary empires soon dismembered. The victorious France, Great Britain, and Italy, suffered serious trauma. The civilian losses were tremendous and over nine million soldiers died during the war. Millions of survivors, with their physical and psychic traumas, had to be reintegrated into civil life.

<sup>1</sup> Françoise THÉBAUD, "The Great War and the Triumph of Sexual Division", cit., p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> Françoise NAVAILH, "The Soviet Model", in Françoise THÉBAUD (ed.), *A History of Women in the West...* cit., p. 227. For a good analysis of women's situation in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century, see Sheila FITZPATRICK, Yuri SLEZKINE (eds.), *In the Shadow of Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Françoise THÉBAUD, "The Great War and the Triumph of Sexual Division", cit., p. 66.

For women, the armistice brought an end to a period of social mobility and financial independence. Motherhood was once more stressed, and all women were asked to return home and concentrate on their traditional occupation for the good of their families and nations. Some refused, but others, tired by years of efforts and loneliness, accepted. The postwar period witnessed marriages in unprecedented numbers. There was a veritable rush to return to private life, to an existence centered on family and children.

Women condition changed, with the Great War sometimes obstructing, yet often accelerating it. Change varied with country, age, and social class. War did little when it comes to division of labor by sex as it turned employers more reluctant than ever when it came to hiring women. From 1921 till 1968, except for the agricultural sector, female employment decreased with every year, except for 1946<sup>1</sup>. In Great Britain persistent unemployment followed a similar trend between the two wars. However, working conditions for domestic services improved. The collapse of sweatshop and cottage work in the textile industry increased the percentage of female workers in light industries. Moreover, the tertiary sector (commerce, banking, public service, and service professions) became the main employer of women. In France women obtained equal access to secondary and higher education. Engineering and business schools were opened to women during the war; baccalaureate for women was instituted in 1919, allowing them to enter universities; and in 1924 differences in the secondary schools curricula, for boys and girls, were eliminated. This feminization of the tertiary sector made possible for young women of the middle-classes to aspire to professional careers. They were therefore the principal beneficiaries of the war, and many of them were aware that their lives no longer resembled the lives of their mothers.

Hard to say if the First World War represented a "revolution" in women's history. Without claiming that I approached and analyzed all aspects of the problem, I can only point to the testimonies that indicate that the Great War changed irreversibly women's status, their place and role within society, their self-perception. As Claire M. Tylee explained:

"At the beginning of the Great War women were encouraged to stay at home, and to leave war, a masculine concern, to men. Many women did no such thing. The war represented an opportunity for 'adventure' for many women. They used it to escape domestic restriction. Through war-work of a myriad different kind, which women volunteered for and originated for themselves, they showed imitative and discipline and they gained self-respect and respect from other women. If women became a mutual admiration society, it was about time somebody gave women the confidence and encouragement to behave like people, not toys"<sup>2</sup>.

Unlike Western historiography, the Romanian one, focusing exclusively on political decisions and military campaigns, on *Great Deeds* and even Greater Achievements<sup>3</sup>, made no room for women within the teleological organized saga of the

<sup>1</sup> J.L. ROBERT, "Women and Work in France during the First World War", in Richard WALL, Jay WINTER (eds.), *The Upheaval of War...*cit., pp. 251-266.

<sup>2</sup> Claire M. TYLEE, *The Great War and Women's Consciousness...*cit., pp. 252-253.

<sup>3</sup> See Constantin KIRIȚESCU, *Istoria războiului pentru întregirea României...*cit.; Pamfil ȘEICARU, *La Roumanie dans la Grande Guerre*, Minard, Paris, 1968; Victor ATANASIU, Ion M. OPREA (eds.), *România în primul război mondial...*cit.; Constantin NUȚU, *România în anii neutralității*,

"War for National Reunification". With the exception of Queen Marie and Ecaterina Teodoriu they are barely mentioned or depicted in literature and arts. Till recently, the daily sufferings, anxieties, and expectations of the unknown were obliterated.

The second part of my paper attempts to answer several basic questions such as: what happened to the Romanian women during the war?; was that period anything else than a time of sufferings and hindrances for them all?; did upper class women help ordinary women to survive and surpass the difficulties brought by two long years of war?; did Romanian authorities adopted special measures as to help the families of mobilized soldiers?; did women succeeded in breaking through the domestic barriers imposed by a traditional society?; did the First World War, in its aftermath, represented a "turning point" for Romanian women?

Romania did not enter the war in 1914. Two long years of neutrality and diplomatic negotiations with the Entente were needed for the government to declare war on the Central Powers<sup>1</sup>. However, Romania was also affected by the war from the very beginning. Neutrality could not protect the Romanian economy from the tremendous impact of the war. All its branches were affected. An underdeveloped industry, and the absence of skilled workers, forced Romania to look for external help and seek for military equipment from abroad. Moreover, disturbances in international and domestic trade contributed to a significant increase of unemployment and a decrease of wages<sup>2</sup>. Agriculture was also negatively affected once the traditional markets were closed<sup>3</sup>. Increased taxation affected peasants, who were forced to sell land as to pay debts. The general mobilization of April 1915 was but to worse the situation. In most cases, men were replaced by women, who were now forced to take care of home and children and also work the field. The absence of their husbands, sons, and fathers added a sudden and often unbearable surplus of responsibilities for women.

The Romanian government somewhat managed to mentally prepare the population for the war. What it failed to achieve within two years of neutrality was to transform a peacetime economy and administration into warfare ones. Women were not encouraged to find jobs and work in industry, administration, public services, as to replace the now absent male labor force. Allowances were not granted to women lacking financial support once men went to war. Severe shortages of public funds, nonetheless ignorance and indifference from the part of the authorities were to put the majority of female population, mainly housewives, in impossibility to take care of their families. This problem was even more acute in urban areas, where survival depended on incomes.

Romanians welcomed enthusiastically the beginning of military hostilities against Austria-Hungary on August 28, 1916: "From now on we have just one goal:

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Editura Științifică, București, 1972; M.N. POPA, *Primul război mondial. 1914-1918*, Editura Științifică, București, 1979; Emil RĂCILĂ, *Contribuții privind lupta românilor pentru apărarea patriei în primul război mondial, 1916-1918*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 1981. For a similar approach in Western literature see R.W. SETON-WATSON, *Roumania and the Great War*, Constable and Company Limited, London, 1915; also Charles Upson CLARK, *United Romania*, Arno Press & The New York Times, New York, 1971.

<sup>1</sup> Keith HITCHINS, *România, 1866-1947*, Romanian transl. by G.G. Potra and D. Răzdolescu, Humanitas, București, 1994, pp. 281-283.

<sup>2</sup> In the case of Bucharest, figures indicate a decrease with 30% of the number of workers.

<sup>3</sup> In 1883, when Romania joined the Central Powers, her economy was strongly tied, not to say dependent, on the economy of Austria-Hungary and Germany.

to win, no matter the sacrifices, because to win means to achieve the national ideal<sup>1</sup>. The mood was optimistic, even among socialists, though the army<sup>2</sup>, the infrastructure, and the society at large were totally unprepared<sup>3</sup>. As many notified, the sanitary service was mobilized only four days after war was declared. Medical personnel and medicines were insufficient<sup>4</sup>.

From the first days of war the Romanian authorities declared "a state of emergency"<sup>5</sup>. Unfortunately, most civilians did not take war seriously. The presence of Zeppelins on the sky of Bucharest was for many a spectacle. Not even real air raids were to convince them enter into shelters, and many women, men, and children were wounded and killed at the beginning<sup>6</sup>. Soon, victims of the military campaign and of the air raids overflowed the hospitals. These hospitals were organized by the Red Cross in cities, at the initiative of middle and upper class women. Due to war circumstances new campaign hospitals were organized in high schools and asylums. Sabina Cantacuzino and Pia Alimăneștianu (sisters of Prime Minister, Ionel I.C. Brătianu), Severa Sihleanu, Maria Moruzi, Eliza Brătianu, Elena Pherekyde, Lisette Corbescu, Eliza Filipescu, Elena Poenaru Căplescu, Cella Delavrancea and her sisters, Elena Catargiu, Natalia Vlădoianu, are but few who worked with the Red Cross<sup>7</sup>. Many other organized charity events, collecting money, food, and clothing for poor families. With December 1916, now in "exile" in Iași, the Romanian government decided to support such activities. Teachers and students were mobilized to collect food, blankets, socks, medicine, and cigarettes for the front. Yet, nothing was done as to ensure the necessary number of qualified nurses. Thus, in many hospitals nurses were in many cases women who offered voluntarily to help the medical personnel. For many, this was a social fashion with no serious and practical motivation. Therefore, they were of no help when it came to take care of wounded soldiers<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *Adevărul*, XXIV, no. 10573, August 29, 1916.

<sup>2</sup> On the eve of the 1916 campaign, the Romanian army had 19 843 officers, 813 758 soldiers and 281 210 horses. The main problem consisted in the scarcity of military equipment. For example, the Romanian armament industry produced every day only two shells for every gun, and one cartridge for every rifle. In this situation, the only solution was the acquisition of arms and munitions from Western Europe. See Keith HITCHINS, *România...cit.*, pp. 284-285.

<sup>3</sup> Vasile T. CÂNCICOV, *Impresiuni și păreri personale din timpul războiului României. Jurnal zilnic 13 August 1916-31 Decembrie 1918*, Atelierele Soc. "Universul", București, 1921, pp. 134-135. Căncicov mentions the fact that immediately after the beginning of the military campaign, the capacity of almost all public services was seriously affected.

<sup>4</sup> Constantin ARGETOIANU, *Pentru cei de mâine. Amintiri din vremea celor de ieri*, vol. 3, Humanitas, București, 1993, pp. 20-30; Alexandru MARGHILOMAN, *Note politice, 1897-1924*, vol. 1, Humanitas, București, 1995, pp. 160-162; Vasile T. CÂNCICOV, *Impresiuni și păreri personale...cit.*, pp. 63, 75.

<sup>5</sup> In Bucharest emergency measures were imposed by the authorities to prevent bombing casualties. See *Adevărul*, XXIX, no. 16573, August 29, 1916.

<sup>6</sup> See *Epoca*, XXIII, no. 226, August 29, 1916; no. 230, September 2, 1916; no. 231, September 3, 1916; no. 311, November 22, 1916; no. 313, November 24, 1916; *Universul*, XXXIV, no. 311, November 22, 1916; no. 312, November 23, 1916; *Adevărul*, XXIX, no. 10654, November 17, 1916. Also Vasile T. CÂNCICOV, *Impresiuni și păreri personale...cit.*, pp. 68-70, 175.

<sup>7</sup> See Pia ALIMĂNEȘTEANU, *Însemnări din timpul ocupației germane: 1916-1918*, București, 1929; Sabina CANTACUZINO, *Din viața familiei I.C. Brătianu*, vol. 2, Editura Albatros, București, 1996; I.G. DUCA, *Amintiri politice*, vol. 1, Expres, București, 1992.

<sup>8</sup> See Neli CORNEA, *Însemnări din vremea războiului*, Editura Librăriei H. Steinber & Fiul, București, 1921, pp. 51-57.

For the Romanian women at large, the above issues were totally irrelevant. Their only concerns were with daily problems. In the absence of husbands, sons, and fathers, now under arms, and unemployed – because they had children, never worked before the war, nonetheless because of the Romanian work legislation, which never granted women permission to work unless their husbands agreed with –, most women were now dependent on state pensions. The Romanian legislation stipulated that the salary of state employees could be transferred to their families during the period of military service. That represented a solution for a small number of families<sup>1</sup>. For the rest, the situation was extremely difficult. The wives of workers from the private sector did not benefit from this legislation. The same was the case of ex-wives. Therefore many ordinary women were forced to beg or borrow food, clothes, coal and wood from rich families and eat at social canteens, which offered them a daily meal. The worse was to come with typhus and cholera, which increased the toll of victims, mainly women and children<sup>2</sup>. Ironically, in many respects, those who decided to flee to Moldavia as to escape occupation suffered more than those who decided to stay.

Within months after going to war, Romanians were to realize that the dream of a rapid victory was fading away. Defeated, panicked and demoralized, the Romanian government and the army decided to retreat to Moldavia<sup>3</sup>. Several politicians and public personalities, well known for their pro-German feelings, were asked to stay and run the occupied territory to the return of the legitimate government at the end of war<sup>4</sup>. Civilians were advised to stay, endure, and hope. Yet, many decided to follow the army:

"Thousands of people wanted to leave, but the Manager's office did not have enough wagons, neither railway engines. All railway lines were blocked with military trains which brought troops from everywhere"<sup>5</sup>.

"A lot of people ran away with carriages and cars, others, the most numerous, walked. The Missions of Red Cross will leave Bucharest at 6 p.m. And the Military Missions at 6.30 p.m."<sup>6</sup>.

For many, the retreat was from the very beginning a deadly adventure. Cold weather, tiredness, the absence of food and shelter, finally diseases proved to be far more dangerous than the enemy.

Central Powers' troops entered Bucharest, on December 6, 1916. The same day, General Mustăța, the police prefect issued an emergency decree that induced panic among civilians<sup>7</sup>. Many of them already were terrified at the idea that they

<sup>1</sup> See *Dezbaterile Adunării Deputaților*, no. 13-15, December 18-20, 1914.

<sup>2</sup> *Epoca*, XXIII, no. 294, November 5, 1916; no. 306, November 17, 1916; *Universul*, XXXIV, no. 306, November 17, 1916; *Adevărul*, XXIX, no. 10654, November 17, 1916. The youngest child of the Royal family, Mircea, was among the first victims of typhus. See I.G. DUCA, *Amintiri politice*, cit., vol. 1, p. 144.

<sup>3</sup> *Epoca*, XXIII, no. 322, December 4, 1916; *Universul*, XXXIV, no. 325, December 4, 1916.

<sup>4</sup> Lupu Kostache was nominated state secretary of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and general A. Mustăța as the new chief of the police (prefect). Alexandru Tzigara-Samurcaș was to represent the Romanian Royal Court in Bucharest. See Șerban RĂDULESCU-ZONER, Beatrice MARINESCU, *Bucureștii în anii primului război mondial...cit.*, pp. 106-107.

<sup>5</sup> Constantin KIRIȚESCU, *Istoria războiului pentru întregirea României...cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 316-317.

<sup>6</sup> Vasile T. CĂNCIOV, *Impresiuni și păreri personale...cit.*, p. 196.

<sup>7</sup> According to the census made by the Germans in January 1917, there were 39% male and 61% female population in the occupied territories. See Șerban RĂDULESCU-ZONER, Beatrice MARINESCU, *Bucureștii în anii primului război mondial...cit.*, pp. 145-146.

have been abandoned forever. The most frightened were the wounded soldiers whom the Romanian authorities could not evacuate in time, and who became prisoners. Women, now depending financially on the German authorities, making efforts to survive, were traumatized by the total lack of information regarding husbands, sons and fathers on the Moldavian front or imprisoned in German POW labor camps. Severe regulations introduced by the German administration in the terrible winter of 1916-1917 further aggravated the situation:

"The winter is terrible and the crisis of fuel is alarming [...] People freeze in their houses; the hospitals do not have wood, the beds are crowded near a little fireplace, surgery operations were suspended; from the city, more and more frozen people are brought [...] The population is hopeless. They rummage after wood and other goods through ruins"<sup>1</sup>.

Soon, even the German authorities to admit the situation and take some measures:

"In order to prevent similar cases, in which people are dying from freezing, the German administration decided to create 'heating-rooms', were, during the night, homeless people can shelter"<sup>2</sup>.

Starvation, due to small quotas, also led to unimaginable sufferings. Poor, hopeless women asked for help from the Romanian *boieri* who afford buying food and other goods from the black market. Other, moved to spontaneous street protests, asking for help, as it happened on March 27, 1917, being accused of pacifism, socialism, collaborationism with the Germans<sup>3</sup>. Raping, random brutality and burglary perpetrated by Bulgarians, Turks, and Hungarians, forcing the German Commandment to impose severe regulations against such "deviating acts", can be added to this gruesome picture<sup>4</sup>.

Women of the Romanian elite also suffered, but in a different ways. Sabina Cantacuzino and Pia Alimăneștianu, Lia Brătianu (the wife of Vintilă Brătianu), Maria Berindei, Elena Stoicescu, and many others were constantly harassed, and forced into compulsory residence. Automobiles, paintings, furniture and other valuables were confiscated from their houses. Their attitude was also different, marked by defiance<sup>5</sup>, despite the penalties coming from the German authorities<sup>6</sup>. Maria Berindei, Pia Alimăneștianu, Maria Șerbescu, Vasilica Dobrescu, Florica Papp took active part in anti-Germans actions<sup>7</sup>. Despite permanent pressure and

<sup>1</sup> See Constatin BACALBAȘA, *Capitala sub ocupația dușmanului, 1916-1918*, București, 1921, p. 69; V.N. DRĂGHICEANU, *707 zile sub cultura pumnului german*, București, 1920, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> *Gazeta Bucureștilor*, XXXVIII, no. 69, February 21, 1917.

<sup>3</sup> See Șerban RĂDULESCU-ZONER, Beatrice MARINESCU, *Bucureștii în anii primului război mondial...cit.*, pp.153-156; Sabina CANTACUZINO, *Din viața familiei I.C. Brătianu...cit.*, pp. 69-70; Maria BUCUR, "Între mituri, icoane și tăceri...cit.", p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> Șerban RĂDULESCU-ZONER, Beatrice MARINESCU, *Bucureștii în anii primului război mondial...cit.*, pp. 118-119.

<sup>5</sup> Sabina CANTACUZINO, *Din viața familiei I.C. Brătianu...cit.*, pp. 38-39, 57, 86, 197-199; Pia ALIMĂNEȘTEANU, *Însemnări din timpul ocupației germane...cit.*, pp. 37-39, 78, 94, 137-141.

<sup>6</sup> Al. TZIGARA-SAMUCAȘ, *Mărturisiri silite*, București, 1922, p. 110; *Gazeta Bucureștilor*, XXXVIII, no. 139, May 20, 1917; no 142, May 23, 1917.

<sup>7</sup> Alexandru MARGHILOMAN, *Note politice...cit.* vol. 3, pp. 112-119, 129-130; Pia ALIMĂNEȘTEANU, *Însemnări din timpul ocupației germane...cit.*, pp. 109-111.

German control, Alexandrina Cantacuzino, Zoe Râmnicăanu, and Lisseta Greceanu helped several wounded Romanian officers, who could not follow the army during the retreat, to escape to Moldavia. The most famous case is that of Florin Rădulescu and Nicolae Tătăranu, two officers who escaped from a hospital with the help of Maria Ghika and Elisabeta Odobescu, who procured counterfeit papers for them<sup>1</sup>. In many other cases wounded soldiers and officers from hospitals and prisons were helped with money, food, cigarettes and clothing. True, there were also women of the Romanian elite, such as Martha Bibescu, Maria Brăiloiu, Marie-Nicole Darvari, Valentina Lahovary, and Alina Antipa, who never opposed, moreover collaborated with and enjoyed the German presence, only to be stigmatized in the aftermath of war.

In Moldavia, now the only area controlled by the Romanian authorities, the population faced even greater difficulties. War, diseases, shortages, and famine indiscriminately killed tens of thousands of soldiers and civilians in the overcrowded city of Iași and in other places. The political and military situation was so desperate that the authorities simply had to give up when it came to mundane social problems. Women and children were ignored, and their needs completely disregarded. Media dedicated several articles to this painful issue, some promises were made, yet only as to keep up the moral of the troops and population. At a practical level, none of the suggested measures were implemented by the government.

As many articles prove, journalists and politicians alike were aware of the way European governments managed to solve the social problems generated by war, mobilization, and displacement<sup>2</sup>. Unfortunately, at least when it comes to women and their participation to the war effort, the Western solution was non-practical. A combination of agrarian economy and traditional mentality that refused to associate women with large scale production was to hinder social mobility and change<sup>3</sup>. Mothers and wives, women managed to survive the war while working at best in agriculture and as domestic servants. When it comes to women participation to the war effort the only noticeable presence is that of nurses, working as volunteers in hospitals, asylums, canteens, and in the ambulance service on the front. Some, like Yvonne Cămărășescu, were decorated for their bravery by King Ferdinand with "Steaua României", and other military and civil honors and medals.

In December 1918, with the return of the Royal family, the government, and the army to Bucharest, newspapers noted:

"At Alba Iulia, today, is a great holiday, it is the saintly day of our nation [...] Today, at Alba Iulia, the Romanian people completed his great historical work, while we, here, into shepherd Bucur fortress, welcome the return of the great fighters for our freedom"<sup>4</sup>.

Victory, at the end of a total war, had its price. Human and material losses on the front and at home totaled in the case of Romania 10% of the population and

<sup>1</sup> N. RUSSU-ARDELEANU, *Prizonier în țara ta. 8 luni în teritoriul ocupat. După povestirile lt. Florin M. Rădulescu*, Botoșani, 1918, pp. 38-39.

<sup>2</sup> *Neamul Românesc*, no. 126, December 3, 1916; no. 106, April 21, 1917.

<sup>3</sup> Nichifor CRAINIC, "Femeia Română", *Neamul Românesc*, no. 154, November 18, 1917; Nicolae IORGA, "Grija răniților și a infirmilor", *Neamul Românesc*, no. 152, January 1, 1917; IDEM, "Războiul nostru", *Neamul Românesc*, no. 138, August 21, 1917.

<sup>4</sup> *Universul*, XXXVI, no. 20, December 2, 1918.



72 000 000 millions gold lei. Those figures hardly indicate the sacrifices, sufferings and trauma of the survivors, civilians and soldiers, women and men, young and old. Men contribution to war was recognized, honored, and rewarded; women contribution was not. In the absence of political rights and social emancipation, the only "consolation prize" for most women was the return of men. Educated women, such as Cecilia Cuțescu-Storck, Neli Cornea, Aida Vrioni, Ella Negruzzi, Princess Olga Sturdza, and Izabela Sadoveanu, coming from upper and middle class Romanian families, raised their voices during and after the war in a constant effort to improve women's status in Romanian society<sup>1</sup>. Yet, most of their efforts were in vain. Feminism was weak and rather unpopular among women, not only men. As for the politicians, women emancipation was a marginal issue when compared with the priorities and challenges of the new state.

My aim with this study was to clarify several aspects regarding women role during the Great War, to underline similarities and differences between "the core" and "the periphery" of Europe from this narrow perspective. The Western theoretical and methodological approach inspired me, helped me raise several essential questions, and ultimately, to frame my reconstruction of the Past in the case of Romania.

The second part, dedicated to Romanian women, was elaborated with difficulties due mainly the lack of primary sources and secondary literature. Thus, it only managed to sketch an incomplete "picture" of Romanian women during the war. The conclusion is obvious. When it comes to women, not only war was different, but also its outcomes and consequences.

Yet, my effort to compare two different "worlds", or at least allow them to comment on each other, was not in vain. Based on the genuine desire to understand and shed light on one aspect concerning Romania during World War I, a major topic that fell into oblivion before exhausting its meanings, my study attempted to move beyond the official and traditional interpretation of history, the continuously reprocessed and mastered for educational, ideological, sometimes entertainment purposes, file of the "War of National Reunification" while focusing on a theme that profited till now rather from a continuous strategy of avoidance and a memory slalom.

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<sup>1</sup> Cecilia CUȚESCU-STORCK, *Fresca unei vieți*, cit.